
3

Creating and Managing Content

Adding Content to Moodle

The first thing most people want to do when they create a course in Moodle is add some content, such as syllabus or a course outline. As I explained in Chapter 2, you can add content to your course using the “Add a resource” menu in the content blocks of your course (see Figure 2-16). In this chapter, we’ll use all of the tools in the resource menu. Chapters 4–12 will cover the tools in the “Add an activity” menu.

Tip: Remember that you need to turn Editing Mode on to see the “Add a resource” and “Add an activity” menus.

The first two tools, “Compose a text page” and “Compose a web page,” can be used to develop content directly in Moodle. The second two, “Link to a file or web site” and “Display a directory,” are used to manage content developed in other programs, such as Word or PowerPoint. You can also add content from other web sites and take advantage of the rich library of information available on the Web.

Let's begin by creating a simple text page for your course.

Compose a Text Page

A text page is a simple plain-text page with little formatting, such as the example in Figure 3-1. You can add paragraphs and whitespace, but that's about it.

Here is a plain text page. There is very little formatting I can use here.
But it is very *easy* to create.

Last modified: Friday, 17 September 2004, 04:52 PM

Figure 3-1. A text page in Moodle

Text pages are very easy to create, however. To create one:

1. Turn Editing Mode on.
2. From the “Add a Resource” menu, select “Compose a text page.” Moodle will then display the page to compose a text page like the one in Figure 3-2.

Adding a new Resource to week 5

Compose a text page

Name:

Summary:

Summary ?

Path: body

Full text:

Write carefully ?

Use emoticons 😊

Figure 3-2. Compose a text page

3. Enter a name for the text page.

Tip: The name you give the page will be displayed in the content block on the main page. Students will access your page by clicking on the name. Be sure to give the page a descriptive name so students will know what they are accessing.

4. Write a summary of the page in the Summary field.
5. Add your text in the Full Text field. If you know some basic HTML tags, you could do some basic formatting in HTML.
6. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click Save Changes

That's all there is to it.

Adding a Web Page

Adding a plain-text page to Moodle isn't the only way to add content. With Moodle, you can easily use an editor to create sophisticated documents which can be displayed in any web browser. The editor works like a word-processing application right in your browser, as you can see in Figure 3-3. Simply type your document directly into the text area and use the formatting tools to customize it.

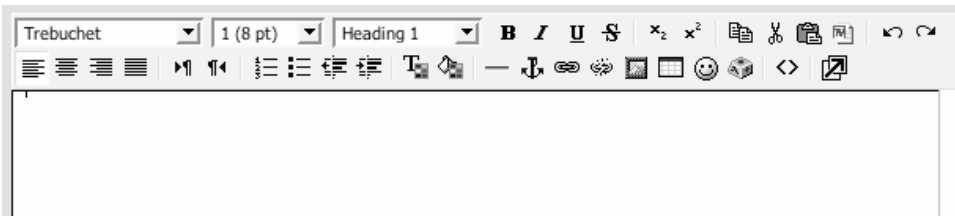


Figure 3-3. HTML editor

Using the in-line HTML editor

Warning: The Moodle HTML editor doesn't work in all browsers. Currently, it works in Netscape 7, Internet Explorer 5.5 or later, Mozilla 1.7, and Firefox. It doesn't work in Safari, Camino, or Opera.


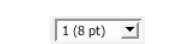
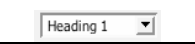
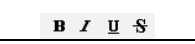
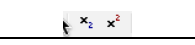



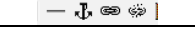


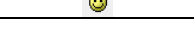
To add content to a web page:

1. Click Turn Editing Mode On.
2. Select "Add Link to File or Web Page" from the "Add a resource" menu in the area where you would like to add the page.
3. Give the file a name and a summary. There's a good help file associated with the summary.
4. Create your document using the HTML editor.

5. Click Submit. Note on the next screen, you'll see a text area with the HTML editor (see Figure 3-3).
6. Type your document, format it, and click Submit.

The HTML editor provides the tools displayed in Table 3-1. Your students will be able to access your new content by clicking on the title in the Topic area where you created the document.

Table 3-1. HTML editor icons

| | |
|---|--|
|  | Font |
|  | Font size |
|  | Style |
|  | Bold, italic, underline, strikethrough |
|  | Superscript or subscript |
|  | Left, center, right, or full justify |
|  | Number or bullet lists |
|  | Change text of background color |
|  | Horizontal rules and anchors |
|  | Images |
|  | Tables |
|  | Emoticons |

Window Options

Any text pages or web pages you create, or web sites you link to, can be displayed in a new window. You can choose to open a new window to display any resource you created.

To display a resource in a new window:

1. Click Show Settings next to the Window label.
2. Select the New Window radio button.
3. Select the options for the window:

Allow the window to be resized

Checking this will allow the user to change the size of the window after it has opened. Unless you have a specific reason for not allowing the user to resize, you should leave this checked.

Allow the window to be scrolled

You can prevent the user from scrolling the new window. Again, unless you have a specific reason to prevent the user from scrolling, leave this checked.

Show the directory links

This will display the user's bookmark or favorites bar in her browser.

Show the location bar

You can hide the address bar, and thus the site's URL, in the pop-up by unchecking this box.

Show the menu bar

The menu bar is the browser menu that allows the user to set bookmarks, print, view the page source, and perform other browser functions.

Show the toolbar

The browser toolbar has the back and forward buttons, as well as the reload and stop buttons.

Show the status bar

The status bar is the lower area of the browser that shows how much of the page has loaded and the target of a link.

Default window width and height

You can set the size of the new window to match the size of the linked page.

Create Link to File or Web Site

You don't have to create all of your content in Moodle. You can also upload and store any digital content that you have created in other applications. Documents you create in a word processor or presentation package can be shared with students in your course. You can also easily add links to other web sites to give your students access to important web resources.

Uploading Other Documents

Although it's easy to generate content directly in Moodle, you can also upload any type of electronic file you like. All you need to do is make sure your students can access it with the appropriate software on their computers.

Once you've added a file to your files area, you can easily add it as a resource for your students. There are two resource types you can use to add files. The first method is to add an "Uploaded File" resources (see Figure 3-4):

1. In Editing Mode, select "Add Link to File or Web Site" from the Resource menu from the content block where you want to add the link to the file.

Link to a file or web site ?

Name:

Summary: Trebuchet 1 (8 pt) Heading 1 **B** *I* U ~~S~~ \times_2 \times^2

Summary ?

Path: body

Location:

Window: ?

Same window

Put resource in a frame to keep site navigation visible

New window

Allow the window to be resized

Allow the window to be scrolled

Show the directory links

Show the location bar

Show the menu bar

Show the toolbar

Figure3-4. Adding a new resource

4. On the Edit page, click the “Choose or upload a file” button. A new window will pop up with the files area directory structure.
5. Find the file you want to add in the files area. You can also upload a new file here if you’d like .
6. On the right side of the files list, you will see a “Choose” link in bold (see Figure 3-5). Click that link. The Files window will close, and the path to the file will be entered into the filename.
7. You can choose to display the file in a new pop-up window. Most of the time, you won’t need to worry about this with uploaded content.
8. The name of the resource will now be an active link in the content block.

Mdl101 -> Files

| Name | Size | Modified | Action |
|--|-----------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Folder | | - 19 Sep 2004, 02:52 PM | Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> backupdata | | - 17 Oct 2004, 09:51 PM | Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> glossary | | - 21 Oct 2004, 12:07 PM | Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> moddata | | - 27 Oct 2004, 04:09 PM | Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> presentation | | - 6 Dec 2004, 10:07 AM | Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> quizzes | | - 27 Oct 2004, 04:09 PM | Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> DCP_1632.JPG | 378.6Kb | 28 Sep 2004, 11:45 AM | <u>Choose</u> Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sample.jpg | 9.7Kb | 27 Oct 2004, 04:09 PM | Choose Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> backup-dina_101-20041027-0207.zip | 2Mb | 27 Oct 2004, 04:07 PM | Choose Unzip List Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> left_index.html | 2.5Kb | 6 Dec 2004, 10:26 AM | Choose Edit Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> main_pres.html | 31Kb | 6 Dec 2004, 10:26 AM | Choose Edit Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> new.zip | 2.4Kb | 8 Jul 2004, 08:12 PM | Choose Unzip List Rename |
| <input type="checkbox"/> presentation.html | 183 bytes | 6 Dec 2004, 10:26 AM | Choose Edit Rename |

With chosen files...

Figure 3-5. Choose file link

Adding a Directory

The other option for displaying files is to create a link to the entire files area or to a subset of the directory structure. To add a file directory:

1. In Editing Mode, select “Display a Directory” in the Resource menu from the content block where you want to add the link to the file.
2. On the Edit page (see Figure 3-6), select the folder you want the students to be able to browse. If you leave the default Main files directory selected, students will be able to browse the entire course files area.
3. When a student clicks on the resulting link, he will see a list of all the files in that folder, as shown in Figure 3-7. He will be able to browse any folders underneath it.

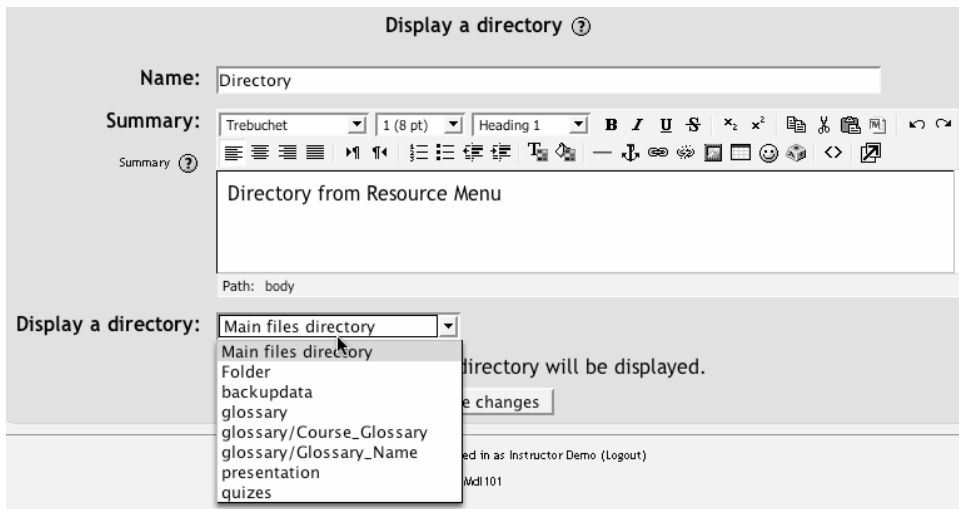


Figure 3-6. Display a directory

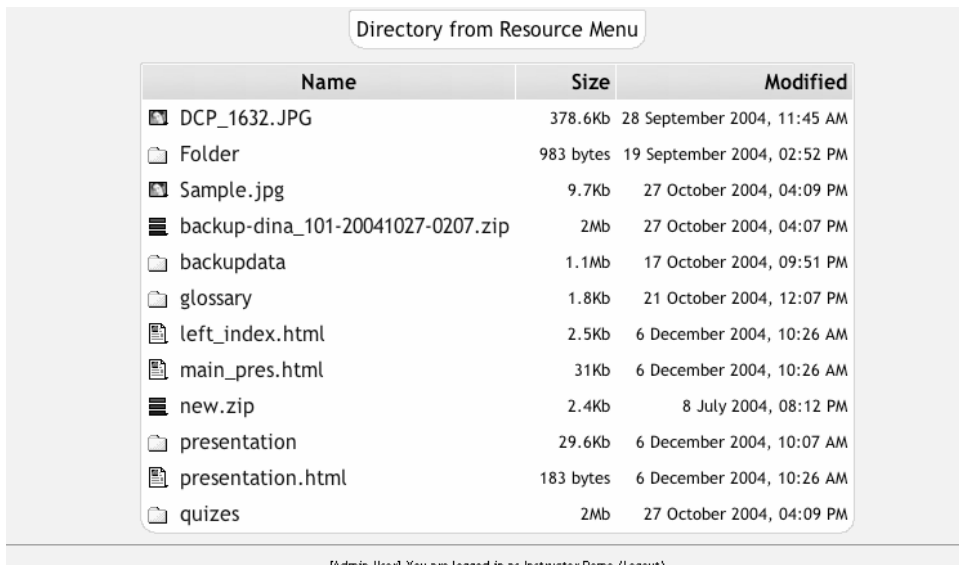


Figure 3-7. Viewing a directory

Creating Links to Other Web Sites

Creating links to other web sites is very similar to adding your own HTML. If the address of the page you want to link to isn't simple, such as <http://www.moodle.org/>, it's probably best to cut and paste it from the address bar of your web browser. That way, you're not typing a weird, long URL into the link text box.

To add a link to another web site:

1. Click Turn Editing Mode On.
2. Select “Link to a file or web site” from the Resource menu in a Topic or Schedule block.
3. Give the new link a name and Summary in the fields at the top of the screen, as shown in Figure 3-8.
4. In the location field, enter the address of the page you want to link to. If you want to look for the address, click the Search button, and Moodle will open a new window and take you to Google.
5. After you have selected the options you want, click Save Changes.

Link to a file or web site ?

Name:

Summary: Trebuchet 1 (8 pt) Heading 1 **B** *I* U ~~S~~ x₂ x²

Summary ?

Path: body

Location: http://

Window: ?

Same window

Put resource in a frame to keep site navigation visible

New window

Allow the window to be resized

Allow the window to be scrolled

Show the directory links

Show the location bar

Show the menu bar

Show the toolbar

Figure 3-8. Adding a new web link

After you enter the link, you’ll see the name of the resource listed in the content block. It is now an active link. If you’ve selected the window pop-up option, a new window will pop up when the user clicks the link.

Parameters

When you create a link to another web site, you can also easily send data about the student and the course to the receiving site. For example, if you want to create a link to

another site in your university that use the same username as your Moodle site, you can send the student and the student's username to the other server. This makes it easier to utilize other dynamic web sites that share data with your Moodle site.

To send data to another server using parameters:

1. At the bottom of the link page, click the "Show settings" button next to the parameters.
2. Select the data you want to send from the list shown in Figure 3-9.
3. The variable name is the name of the variable that the receiving server is expecting. For example, if you're sending the student's username and the server wants a variable called userID, select username in the parameter list and put userID in the Variable name field.

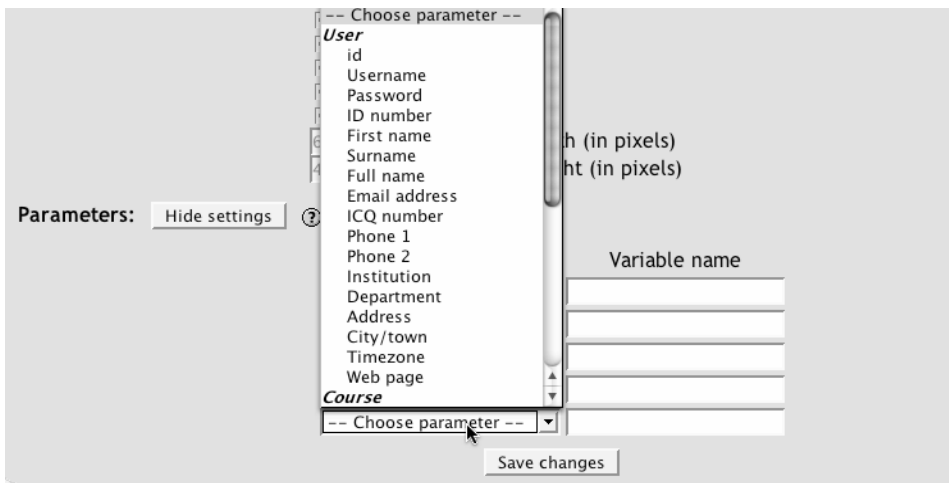


Figure 3-9. Parameter list

Managing and Updating Your Content

Uploading content is only half the battle of content management in Moodle. You'll need to ensure your uploaded content is current, and you'll occasionally want to replace or delete files. Fortunately, Moodle has some useful features to help you manage your content once it's on the server.

File Area Tools

Once you've uploaded your files, they are stored in the Files area. When you create a link to a file, you store the file in the Files area and create a link for your students to access it.

To access the Files area, click the Files link in the Administration block, as shown in Figure 3-10.

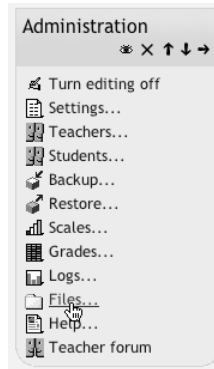


Figure 3-10. Files link in the Administration area

Each uploaded file and file folder has a checkbox beside it. You can select one or more files and then move or archive them using the tools in the dropdown menu on the lower-left side of the file list. By default, it reads “With chosen files....” If you click on the menu, you’ll see three things you can do with your chosen files:

Move to another folder

To move uploaded content to another folder in the Files area:

1. Select the file(s) you want to move.
2. Select “Move to another folder.”
3. Navigate to the folder where you want to move the selected files.
4. You’ll see a new button at the bottom of the screen that says “Move Files here.” Click the button, and the files will move to the new location.

Delete completely

This will remove all trace of the file from your Moodle site.

Create zip archive

A zip archive is a compressed file that holds the files you’ve selected. It’s an easy way to create an archive of older files or create an easy-to-download collection of documents, such as all of the images for a lecture. Once the archive has been created and moved to the target computer, you’ll need to unzip it to access the content inside. If you want students to download the archive, they will need an unzipping utility such as WinZip, MacZip, or Stuffit Expander to unpack the archive. Modern versions of Windows and Macintosh have built-in zip utilities. Moodle has a built-in zip utility as well that will allow you to unzip the archive directly into your files area. As Figure 3-11 shows, there are a few new options that come with a zip archive. The options include:

Unzip

This will unpack your archive into your files area.

List

Clicking this will display a list of files stored in the archive. You cannot access files through this list.

Restore

If you've backed up your Moodle class and uploaded the zip archive of the backup, you can restore your content using this command. We'll cover this in more detail in Chapter 13.

The screenshot shows a file manager interface with a table of files. The file 'new.zip' is selected, and a context menu is open over it, showing options: 'Unzip', 'List', 'Restore', and 'Rename'. The 'Unzip' option is highlighted with a mouse cursor.

| File Name | Size | Date | Actions |
|-------------------|-----------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| left_index.html | 2.0Kb | 6 Dec 2004, 10:26 AM | Edit Rename |
| main_pres.html | 31Kb | 6 Dec 2004, 10:26 AM | Edit Rename |
| new.zip | 2.4Kb | 8 Jul 2004, 08:12 PM | Unzip List Restore Rename |
| presentation.html | 183 bytes | 6 Dec 2004, 10:26 AM | Edit Rename |

Figure 3-11. Zip file options

Tracking Versions

One of the biggest challenges you will face in keeping your content organized is dealing with versioning. As the semester progresses, you may have multiple versions of your syllabus which reflect changes to the calendar. Or you may have multiple versions of a presentation that has evolved over the years. There are a couple of strategies you can use to track versions and ensure that your students are accessing the correct version.

The easiest way is to develop a naming scheme for your files. While many people will attach a version number, I recommend using a date stamp. A date stamp lets people know just how recent the version is, and you don't have to track the current version number. To add a date stamp, simply add the date you saved the version to the end of the filename name. For example, the first version of a syllabus for your fall course may be called Syllabus_8_30.rtf. Later in the semester, you may post a revised version named Syllabus_9_21.rtf. Date versioning helps you keep track of the version on the server and the latest version on your computer.

There are also a number of tools in Moodle to help you deal with versioning. I recommend creating a folder in your course to archive older versions of documents. To create an archive folder:

1. Click on the Files link.
2. Click the Make a Folder button.
3. Name the folder Course Archives and click Save Changes.

Later, you can use the File tools to move old versions of a file into the archives area, which will enable you to keep a record of older versions while keeping only the latest version in the active area.

Effective Content Practices

There are a few effective practices that can make life easier for you and your students. First, there are file format tricks to ensure your students can download and use your content. Second, make sure the bit size of your files is as small as it can be so your students won't grow old waiting to download tomorrow's lecture notes. Third, there are creative ways to use static content in your courses to help you and your students succeed.

File Formats

Every file you create and save on your computer has a specific file format. For example, Word files are saved in Word format, and can be opened only in a compatible version of Word. However, this can cause problems if your students don't have the same version of Word you do. A solution is to continue to create your documents in Word but save them as Rich Text Format, or RTF, a format that can be opened by a wide variety of word processing programs. In most versions of Word, you can save a file as RTF by following these steps:

1. Select Save As... from the file menu.
2. Choose RTF from the file type dropdown.
3. Save the RTF copy of your document.

There are a number of file formats for displaying text and images that almost everyone can open, regardless of their computing platform, and you should strive to use these whenever possible. These formats include RTF, Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), Postscript Display Format (PDF), and picture formats, including pict, tiff, jpeg, gif, and png.

Table 3-2 describes some common file formats.

Table 3-2: File types

| File type | Description | Software needed to use the file |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| RTF | A word-processor format that is readable by a wide range of applications. You can save Word and PowerPoint documents as RTF. | Most modern word processors will read RTF. In Windows, the free WordPad utility will open RTF. On Mac OS X, TextEdit will open these files. |
| HTML | The language of the Web. Every web page displayed in a browser is created in HTML. Moodle has a built-in HTML editor you can use to create documents directly in Moodle. | Any web browser. Some word processors will also read HTML documents. |
| PDF | Adobe has created a format that is very portable but can be difficult to create. If you have Acrobat (not the reader but the professional package) or are using Mac OS X, you can usually use the print function from within Word or other application to create a PDF | Acrobat Reader is a free download from Adobe. |
| PowerPoint (ppt) | As the most widely used presentation-creation software, PowerPoint files are natural candidates for upload. The presentations are easy to share, but be careful about file size and access. | PowerPoint or PowerPoint viewer. Some newer versions of PowerPoint allow you to generate a self-playing file (which tend to be big). |
| Pictures (pict, tiff, jpeg, gif, png) | There are a lot of graphic file formats. Generally, only gif, jpeg and png are viewable directly in a browser. | gif, jpeg, png require a browser. Other formats require appropriate external viewers. |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Audio files (wav, mp3, ram, mov) | Audio files can be large, depending on your bit rate and compression format. Be sure the file size is smaller than the maximum file upload size for Moodle. Check with your system administrator. | Your students will need media player software. Many students will be able to play audio in mp3 format. |
| Video files (mov, wmv, rv) | Your Moodle server may not accept a large video file. Before you attempt to upload a large video file, ask your system administrator about file size limits. Your students will need to download the entire video, which may be a problem with a slow dial-up connection | To view a video, your students will need a media player that can play the appropriate format. Know whether your movies can play in Quicktime, Windows Media Player, or Real Player. |

Reducing File Sizes

Equally important to creating files your students can open is getting them to a manageable size. Usually, graphics are the biggest offenders, and they crop up in some unlikely places. There are three strategies that will give you the best results for the effort.

Strategy 1: Save your PowerPoint presentations as RTF

In my experience, big PowerPoint files are the worst file size offenders. It's easy to add cool transitions, clip art, and images that will cause a simple hour-long presentation to balloon into a multi-megabyte behemoth that will take an hour to download. Not a good use of time for something that students will simply print out and bring to class.

I strongly recommend saving your slides as an RTF text outline. Students will get the benefits of the outline of the lecture and be able to use them to take notes, but the file will be quick and easy to download and viewable in a wide range of applications. Outline format is a text format. You'll lose all of your nifty transitions and the images in the presentation. But the advantages of a quick download and having an outline for note taking usually outweigh the lost information.

If you have important images or diagrams in the presentation, add them to your Moodle course separately. Students can then download them individually if they choose.

To save your PowerPoint as RTF:

1. From the Files menu, select Save As.

2. In the Save As window, select Outline (Rich Text Format) from the Format menu.
3. Click Save to save your outline.

Strategy 2: Scan articles as text, not images

There are many good articles that just aren't available in electronic format. If you want to avoid printing an entire reader, scanning articles is an easy way to give your students access to important resources. Many libraries now have electronic reserve services that will scan them for you.

Scanning articles can result in very large files because most scanner software, by default, scans everything as a graphic. So when you scan a page, you're really creating a picture of the page that is much larger than a text version. The computer has to store information about every dot on the page, not just information about the characters and their placement on the page.

The solution is to use a software tool called Optical Character Recognition, or OCR. This great tool recognizes the shape of the letters and gives you a text version of the article. You can then manipulate the text version in the same way you'd edit any other text document. It has the added advantage of being accessible to screen readers for students with visual disabilities.

OCR software is probably available somewhere on your campus. OmniPage Pro is currently the most popular OCR package. It's come a long way in the last few years and is now very powerful. If you have a relatively clean photocopy of the articles you want to share, scanning them will be a very fast process.

Strategy 3: Reduce your image size and use compression

Finally, if you have digital images, it's very important to optimize their size and resolution for sharing over the Web. Modern digital cameras and scanners can produce amazing, crystal-clear images, but at a price of very large file sizes. A full resolution photograph in a modern camera can be 4 megabytes, which will take more than 5 minutes to download on a 56k modem.

Most cameras and scanners come with free utilities that enable you to manipulate images. Other programs such as Photoshop are fully featured, professional packages with lots of tools. To reduce your file size, you only need some very simple tools that most image-manipulation software provides.

The key to getting manageable images is to first reduce the size of the image. If your image will be primarily viewed on the screen, you can make it 72 dpi and it will still be viewable. If you plan to have your students print the image, then it will need to be higher resolution. Experiment with some different sizes and resolutions to get a result you're happy with.

When your image is the right size, save it at the minimum quality as a web-compatible format such as jpeg or gif. These formats will make your file size even smaller by eliminating unnecessary and redundant data.

By reducing the size of your files, you'll make life easier for yourself and your students. But the smallest, most portable files in the world don't mean much if your students can't use them successfully in your class. Next, we'll discuss some interesting ways you can use content to make your Moodle class a valuable resource for your students.

Creative Content

Moodle allows you to upload just about any file that resides on your computer. However, the key to a successful content strategy is knowing what content helps your students be successful, and what content is unnecessary or confusing. Below are two best practices for adding content to your course. These practices work well in a range of course designs, but there are other practices that might work just as well for your particular course.

Uploading lecture notes

One of the easiest ways to use Moodle to increase student learning is to upload your lecture notes before the lecture. Providing access to your lecture outlines *before* a class meeting gives your students a tool to prepare for class and structure their class notes. If students know which topics you consider important enough to include in your lecture, they are more likely to pay attention to those areas in any assigned readings. During class, they can use the lecture notes as a base outline and concentrate on elaborating the main ideas with examples. Lecture notes are also a useful tool for students whose first language is different from that of the speaker. If they get lost during a lecture, they can refer to the notes to get back on track.

If you use PowerPoint in your lectures, a simple way to create and upload lecture notes is to save your slides as an RTF file. This will eliminate graphics and other extras and provide the students with a plain-text outline. It will be easy to download and print for class.

External web sites

Effectively using the Web means you don't have to create or photocopy everything you want to use in your class. There is a lot of quality content available on the Web, if you know where to look and how to evaluate it. A full discussion about vetting online resources is beyond the scope of this book, but your institution's librarian can recommend some sources to get you started.

Most newspapers and news magazines have online versions you can bring into your class for discussions of current events. Universities, schools, and non-profit organizations publish huge amounts of content available for you to use free of charge.

Here are a couple of good sites where you can begin your search for other sites:

<http://www.merlot.org>

A community dedicated to sharing and evaluating educational resources, simulations, and other materials

<http://www.wikipedia.org>

An online encyclopedia developed by thousands of volunteers

<http://www.eoe.org>

An online repository of Java learning objects submitted by educators from around the world

This list is by no means exhaustive. Simply using Google as a tool in your class would vastly expand the amount and variety of content available to your students.

Summary

Ultimately, the content you develop and share in your Moodle course is up to you. Static Moodle content provides resources for students as they engage in the learning process. In this chapter, we've looked at how to upload and create content for your Moodle course. In the next chapter, we'll discuss some of the dynamic activities you can add to your class to make it truly compelling.